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ABSTRACT

This digest summarizes a report of a study of the research literature on faculty publication productivity, with special emphasis on gender as a factor in publishing productivity. Major issues addressed by the report include: (1) the existence of significant gender and race differences in publishing productivity, with women and minorities over-represented among nonprolific faculty authors; (2) the relationship of gender to traditional measures of publication quantity and quality, and the finding that gender differences in institutional rewards, such as tenure and salary, remain even when publishing productivity is controlled; (3) reasons for the small percentage of faculty that publish prolifically, including the role of the institution in helping faculty sustain a commitment to publishing through work assignments; (4) reasons why so few women and minorities are among the prolific publishers, noting that productivity reflects career paths, work assignments, interests, and access to resources more characteristic of white men than of most women and minorities; and (5) implications for practice, such as institutional recognition of a broad range of scholarly activities including conference presentations, speeches, and electronic venues of communication. (DB)

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Elizabeth G. Creamer

ERIC® Clearinghouse
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Development

The George Washington University
WASHINGTON DC

One Dupont Circle
Suite 630
Washington, DC
20036-1183

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Assessing Faculty Publication Productivity

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Elizabeth G. Creamer

Faculty publishing productivity is often used as an index of departmental and institutional prestige and is strongly associated with an individual faculty member's reputation, visibility, and advancement in the academic reward structure, particularly at research institutions. Lower levels of scholarly productivity, as reflected by quantity of publications, is one explanation that focuses on why women and minorities have not progressed more rapidly in the academic reward structure; why they continue to be promoted at slower and lower rates than majority, male academics; and why they are concentrated in less prestigious institutions. Understanding the factors associated with publishing productivity and how gender and race are insinuated in traditional criteria, used to assess faculty research productivity, can assist academic administrators in defining methods of shaping institutional reward structures in ways that advance the careers of a heterogenous faculty.

An overwhelming amount of research has been published about faculty research performance. A subset of this literature addresses variations by gender and race in publication productivity and in the impact of the criteria used to measure it. This study provides a synthesis of the research literature about how gender is a factor in publishing productivity. The discussion extends John Creswell's 1985 ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report on faculty research performance by summarizing the literature, produced since its publication, and in the focus on the role of gender

The literature about gender differences in faculty productivity is grounded in the work of a group of scholars, primarily in sociology and the sociology of science, who have contributed to the study of women's success in science careers in science and to stratification in higher education. It is supplemented by the insights of feminists exploring the experiences of academic women and the feminist critique of traditional measures of research productivity.

This study explores publication productivity, not other aspects of faculty work performance, such as teaching or service. The focus is on faculty, because they produce the majority of scholarly publications at doctoral granting institutions.

In addition to those initiating research in the area, academics, such as department heads or deans, who have oversight for promotion and tenure decisions, will find the topic of faculty publishing productivity to be relevant. It is most germane to settings where research and scholarly publications are considered central to rewards. It will be particularly useful for academics called to judge the records of colleagues in a number of academic fields as well as those trying to understand the broader context of their own publishing productivity.

There are several major questions about gender and race differences in faculty publishing productivity:

Are there significant gender and race differences in publishing productivity?
Although there are large variations by discipline, the majority of male and female faculty members at four-year institutions produce a dozen or fewer articles in academic or professional journals over their careers. While gender differences in average publication rates appear to have narrowed in many fields (Blackburn & Lawrence, 1996), particularly when a relatively short time frame is used for study, women are significantly less likely than men to be among the top producers of publications in their fields. This small group of highly prolific writers account for a large proportion of the literature produced in an academic field (Cole & Singer, 1991). The relative absence of the voices of women and minorities in widely cited literature is explained in part by the fact that few women and minorities are among prolific authors. Their under-representation among the prolific and over-representation among nonpublishers is the major reason for the characterization of faculty women as being less productive than faculty men.

How are traditional measures of publication quantity and quality influenced by gender?
On average, gender differences in institutional rewards, such as tenure and salary, remain even when publishing productivity is controlled. In other words, women generally receive fewer resources and recognition than men for comparable productivity (Long & Fox, 1995). This leads

to the conclusion that stratification in science, or the concentration of women and minorities in the lower ranks and t less prestigious institutions, cannot fully be justified by the assumption that impersonal, universal criteria are equitably applied (Long & Fox, 1995).

What explains why such a small group of faculty are prolific?

Although the number of women is minuscule, prolific male and female publishers probably are more similar than dissimilar. Prolific writers are generally senior scholars at doctoral granting institutions whose interest in research, work assignment, and access to resources have coalesced to support a commitment to research that is sustained over decades. Many widely recognized authors who have made a substantial contribution to the knowledge in an academic field, such as through a noteworthy book, are not prolific writers.

Institutional policies and practices contribute, but do not determine, whether a faculty member initiates and sustains a substantial record of scholarly publishing. The value awarded to scholarly publishing in the institutional reward structure is most instrumental in determining whether a faculty member initiates a publishing record early in his or her career as a faculty member. The institution plays the most significant role in helping a faculty member to sustain a commitment to publishing through a work assignment. Time devoted to research and interest in research are stronger predictors of career research productivity than the institutional reward structure, including salary (Dill 1986).

Factors that are external to the institution play a central role to sustaining the productivity of prolific scholars, and colleagues who are external to the institution are the primary source of recognition and reinforcement for prolific writers. Lack of engagement in influential networks is one reason that the institutional reward structure may be even more influential to women's productivity than it is to men's.

Why are so few women and minorities among those who are prolific?

Prolific writers are disproportionately likely to be white males because the primary criteria used to define productivity, quantity of journal articles and citations to them, reflect career paths, work assignments, interests, and access to resources that are much more characteristic of white men than most women and minorities. This suggests that, in addition to examining the question of whether traditional productivity criteria are equitably applied, it is essential to examine the question of whether productivity criteria are equitable.

What are the implications for practice?

A major implication from a synthesis of the research literature is the suggestion that one way to create a more heterogenous faculty is to recognize a broad range of scholarly activities as making a contribution to the production and communication of knowledge. Diversifying the faculty in the United States requires diversifying the criteria used to judge their work performance. Traditional measures of impact or utility of publications, such as citations, must be expanded to recognize that academics are just one of many communities that are impacted by the production of new knowledge. New, convenient methods are needed to assess the impact of a variety of forms of scholarly communication, such as through unpublished works, conference, presentations, speeches, and the ever expanding electronic venues of communication.

There is almost no research about variations by race, and the correlates of publishing productivity or to substantiate the hypothesis that traditional measures of publishing productivity impact all or some minorities in the same ways they have been suggested in this text to impact faculty women. The characteristics of those acknowledged as authorities, can be explored by assessing the extent that collegial networks and the communication of knowledge is gender and race segregated.

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